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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR LAYS CORNERSTONE FOR AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN
IRAQ-SULAYMANIYAH

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Ambassador Khalilzad joined President Talabani and Planning Minister Dr. Barham Salih on December 11 in laying the cornerstone of the future American University in Iraq - Sulaymaniyah (AUI-S). The Kurdistan Regional Government is contributing \$10 million to the project. In private meetings with Talabani and Salih, the Ambassador also committed \$10 million, pending the completion of a feasibility plan and fund raising strategy. Other funds will be forthcoming from private donors. The occasion was marked with speeches stressing that this historic occasion would not have been possible without the U.S.-led liberation of Iraq. Some Middle Eastern media misreported the Ambassador's speech as calling for the reelection of President Talabani. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. The American University project is the brainchild of the Minister of Planning, Dr. Barham Salih (a senior figure in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, the party of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani; Sulaymaniyah is its geographical base). AUI-S aspires to emulate the longstanding American Universities in Beirut and Cairo and the new ones in Kuwait and Sharjah. Like them, AUI-S will be a fee-paying institution, but it is not affiliated with any university. Dr. Barham has leveraged the proposed U.S. contribution and the credibility it provides, to secure pledges totaling millions of dollars from the KRG and the private sector in Sulaymaniyah; he says KRG-Erbil Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani has pledged to contribute as well (amount TBD).

[1](#)3. According to the contractor charged with drawing up the initial plans for the University (Federal Development and Contracting based in Sulaimani), phase one construction is to begin in July 2006 and be complete by September 2007; the first semester is slated to begin in December 2006 with one thousand students in an English preparatory program. The departments planned for Phase One are: Business Administration, Economics, Finance, Marketing, Computer Engineering, and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Eventually, AUI-S is to have five thousand students drawn from the Kurdistan region as well as other parts of Iraq and the Mideast.

[1](#)4. The Board of Trustees comprises Dr. Barham, Prof. John Agresto, Prof. Kanaan Makiya, Prof. Khalid Salih, Dr. Rajaa Al Khuzai, Mr. Farook Mustafa Rasool, and Mr. Basil Rahim.

[1](#)5. The December 11 ceremony at the site of the future campus, was held in front of several hundred, including many students. KRG-Sulaymaniyah Prime Minister Omar Fattah, Dr. Barham, Ambassador Khalilzad, and President Talabani all gave speeches, then the Ambassador joined the President and Dr. Barham in laying the cornerstone. We note that some Arabic-language newspapers (notably Al-Sharq Al-Awsat and Al-Zaman) misreported the Ambassador as saying that the Iraqi legislature that will emerge from this month's elections should re-elect President Talabani. In fact, as correctly reported in the Kurdish-language Kurdestani Nwe, the Ambassador merely noted that the new legislature would elect a President "and I can imagine the result." The crowd loved it.

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